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TRAVEL

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PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY NWACHUKWU FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

“So Boulder.”
I heard it first from friends who moved there, as in: “The woman swimming in the lane next to me today was an Olympian. So Boulder.” Or: “Our grocery store is offering goat yoga. So Boulder.” Then I began visiting, and I heard it not only from Boulderites (in an adoring, self-deprecating way that makes you want to search for skirts about “Boulderlandia”) but also under my own breath. Like when I found a rack of Prana dresses at McGuckin’s, the beloved hardware store; or when I realized that a pet shop called P.C.’s Pantry sells gluten-free biscuits and has an in-house baker; or when I learned that February is Stout Month, which just might, among locals, have more celebrants than Valentine’s Day.
For a city of just 103,000 residents (almost a third of whom are students at the University of Colorado at Boulder), it packs a lot of punch.

YOU’RE GOING WHERE?

Boulder

The concise Colorado city certainly does things its own way. But it’s hard to dislike a place with open athleisure space and a month dedicated to beer.

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN
Special to The Washington Post

And for good reason: At 5,430 feet and generally sunny, it’s a spectacularly beautiful destination that’s been smart (and pioneering) about growth and preserving open space, so it’s a magnet for athletes, bohemians, scientists and outdoor enthusiasts of every ilk. When I visited my friends, for example, they both were training: she for her umpteenth Ironman; he for a 50-mile run at 10,000 feet. So Boulder. With a progressive dining and brewing scene, it’s a breeze to eat healthfully and drink locally. Even outdoor music is better in the Front Range: You won’t regret splurging for a concert ticket at Red Rocks, just to the south. So what’s the catch? The average home now costs \$1.2 million. And there’s an annoying surplus of youthful energy, from the CU-Boulder students to the octogenarians who pass you on the bike path. You’ve been warned.

BOULDER CONTINUED ON F4

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: In Boulder, Colo.: A vintage cash register in the lobby of the Hotel Boulderado; a plate of roasted fava beans at Bramble & Hare; a portrait of founder Doug Emerson at University Bicycles; a gathering of friends on the lawn at Chautauqua Park.

Boulder runs on its own energy

BOULDER FROM F1

Go

Local Faves

Here's a hiking tip: When you're winded climbing up **Mount Sanitas** and a runner flits by you in fluorescent yoga pants (and then passes you again after summiting), remind yourself you're still adjusting to the altitude, even if you kind of already adjusted last week. Just west of downtown, Sanitas is among the most popular hikes for locals and dogs. My friends and I chose a moderate 2.5-mile loop that gained 1,350 feet in elevation, and the view from the top was stunning. I looked out to see Denver, the I.M. Pei-designed National Center for Atmospheric Research and CU-Boulder's red-roofed campus. If you really want to roll like the locals, end your adventure at Sweet Cow, where you can line up with the groupies for a scoop of the best ice cream in town.

Bad news, friends: You just missed Tube to Work Day, July 11. But you can still enjoy **Boulder Creek**, where locals come out to play every day of the week. The creek meanders from Boulder Canyon right through downtown, and the adjacent 5.5-mile paved path is great for walking, running and biking. Pick up provisions at the farmers market or dogs at Mustard's Last Stand and picnic by the water. Dip your toes into the local culture, which often involves students swaying in hammocks and smoking weed. (I'm sure they're studying.) Tubing season lasts all summer: Start at Ebin G. Fine Park, where work attire is discouraged.

Guidebook musts

On the **Celestial Seasonings Tour**, the factory in northeast Boulder sounds and looks like any other — machines whirring, forklifts crawling. But it smells like stepping into a box of Sleepy-time tea. Our guide, Debbie, asked us not to touch anything: "You don't have to put your nose on something to smell it. That's just gross." Wearing super-flattering blue hairnets, we learned about blendermaster Charlie, who might taste 120 teas and herbal infusions a day, and walked into the calming — and eye-wateringly strong — peppermint room. At the end, Debbie explained that it takes three seconds for a machine to wrap a box in plastic "and 10 minutes to get it off."

Since it opened in 1898, the **Colorado Chautauqua** — part of a national cultural movement from the late 19th and early 20th centuries — has celebrated nature, lifelong learning, music and the arts. Nestled against the famed Flatirons, it remains a treasured spot that operates in the spirit of its founders. You can hike 48 miles of trails, rent original cottages, eat in the dining hall or attend a concert. (On deck: the Gypsy Kings, Ziggy Marley and Boz Scaggs.) But the best of Chautauqua can be found just by showing up with friends. A couple of years ago, I had a birthday picnic on the lawn. On a nice day, you'll see a steady stream of hikers. Start at the Ranger Cottage, the hub for all city hikes, plenty of which are accessible and kid-friendly. For a steep climb, rock scrambling and epic view, try the First and Second Flatiron hike.

Eat

Local Faves

At **Shine Restaurant & Potion Bar**, my friend Sarah said "It's a sign of an excellent menu that you're paralyzed by all the good choices," which is how I felt in general about dining in Boulder. Shine (from Trilogy Wine Bar & Lounge's Blissful Sisters, as the triplets are known) features a spirited menu — mushroom bisque, probiotic slaw sampler, lamb meatballs — and life-enhancing libations. (One of our "potions" included a B12 shot from a syringe.) It wasn't until we were later recalling the scrumptious buttermilk biscuit of Sarah's veggie burger that we remembered the restaurant is 100-percent gluten free. If you can't get a table, head to nearby Rincon Argentino for killer empanadas.

A comfortable, intimate neighborhood farmhouse kitchen and pub, **Bramble & Hare** may be better known for its cocktails (ostensibly, beyond the witty names such as Here I Am, Arrack You Like a Hurricane). But equal-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A sweeping view across the Hotel Boulderado, which has kept its original appointments since 1909. Jon Eybers, center, and his daughter Brooke, 10, get some help in making a selection from University Bicycles sales associate Josh Kuntz. Randi Zimmerman of Liberty Puzzles inspects the product as the wall of shame of customers' naughty, piece-eating dogs rises behind her. A limoncello cocktail at Pizzeria Locale. The grass-fed, local beef burger at Shine Restaurant & Potion Bar.

📍 For an interactive map with addresses and contact information, visit wapo.st/boulder

ly notable: Nearly all the food is sourced at the chef's northeast Boulder farm. A young tattooed server wearing a crocheted bow tie had me at mention of the seared farm carrots with a pistachio tarator. The menu changes daily, but the mac and cheese is a staple, as are rustic dishes such as pork and white bean chili, root vegetable curry and beef bread pudding. Bramble's elegant sibling, Black Cat, adjoins in the back. Peek next door for some magical decor.

Guidebook musts

If Boulderites ever kick off their Birks and dress up for dinner, it very well may be for **Pizzeria Locale**. The elegant restaurant serves classic Neapolitan-style pizza with perfectly doughy crust and spare, flavorful toppings. Locale — those in the know pronounce the "e" — takes pride in its Stefano Ferrara pizza oven, which cooks pizza in 90 seconds at 900 degrees, and its almost exclusively Italian wine list. A marble bar curves around the open kitchen, and alfresco dining is as good for seeing and being seen as it is for pizza-savoring. I sat outside with a lunch special (\$12 for Margherita pizza, half an arugula salad and iced tea served in striking Italian glassware) and kept feeling like I should say "Grazie" to my server.

The **Boulder Dushanbe Tea-house** was constructed 30 years ago by hand (as in no power tools) in Boulder's sister city, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, before it was disassembled, shipped and rebuilt here. Whether you visit for breakfast, lunch, dinner or afternoon tea — during which you can order Argentine mushrooms, Thai fish cakes, Indian samosas or Chinese tea glazed ribs — you'll think you've walked into a Persian shrine. Of note: hand-carved cedar columns, an ornate, hand-painted ceiling and hand-sculpted, life-size copper figures in the bubbling fountain. Oh, and the tea! Find more than 100 loose-leaf options at the bar. From July 28-29, the tea-house hosts the Rocky Mountain Tea Festival.

Shop

Local Faves

Easy to navigate by bike, Boulder is a favorite of triathletes, who find joy in suffering up excruciating hills. But even mere mortals can bike here, and **University Bicycles** is the place to start. U-Bikes, as it's called, has a solid collection of rentals, a great inventory of helmets, bike bags and maps, and fun vintage cycles hanging from the ceiling — such as the Schwinn Stingray with a baseball-bat holder. Mountain bikers, try Valmont Bike Park and the more challenging Betasso Preserve. Check U-Bikes' website for rides from the shop, from five to 65 miles. Need bars, energy chews, pumps, tubes or lights after hours? Visit the store's velo vending machine out front, natch.

When I travel, I'm all about finding gifts that are local, consumable and compact, so I hit the jackpot at **Savory Spice Shop**. Who wouldn't love Red Rocks Hickory Smoke Seasoning and Pyramid Peak Lemon Pepper? Savory originated in Denver and now has many locations, but some items — such as the Best of Boulder gift set I bought (including Pearl Street Plank Salmon Rub and Hippy Dip Olive Oil and Salad Spice) are only available here. An impressive list of local businesses, from ice cream shops to breweries, use Savory's spices. For those with a sweet tooth: The Black Onyx chocolate sugar's got your name on it.

Guidebook musts

Oh, the bounty! Among the pleasures I sampled at the **Boulder County Farmers Market**: tomatoes so red they looked like they'd been Photoshopped, dried peaches, black-bean dip, artisanal mole, hard pretzels, goat cheese, pea shoots, edible flowers, pesto and a bitter mustard green called mizuna. Every Saturday through mid-November, the market delights its throngs of locals and visitors who line up for the cash-only Izzio Artisan Bakery, gaze at Hazel Dell's wacky lion's mane mushrooms and sample cherry dark chocolate from the Fortuna Chocolate truck. The Wednesday evening market is less crowded; both have live music weekly.

My old neighbors loved jigsaw puzzles, and it was at their house that I first saw a work of art from **Liberty Puzzles** with its gorgeous, quarter-inch maple veneer pieces that send their cardboard brethren sulking back to the closet. So I was pleased to learn that Liberty, a throwback company founded in 2005, produces its puzzles in Boulder. Weekday afternoons, guides will show you around the factory, which includes laser-cutting machines, a take-apart room where humans check that pieces are fully separated, and the wall of shame — a

BOULDER CONTINUED ON F5

PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY NWACHUKWU FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In Colorado's magnet for bohemians, wide-open spaces leave room to be you

BOULDER FROM F4

photo collage of naughty dogs. (Liberty will replace pieces that are lost and, er, eaten.) Each of the 700 puzzles includes "whimsy" shapes that reflect the theme, and visitors can pick a free one from the extras jar. I picked a guitar. Buy puzzles here, or visit its retail location in the Pearl Street Mall.

Stay

Local Faves

Boulder Adventure Lodge is the real deal. Just three miles west of the Pearl Street Mall, its rustic rooms sit on Four Mile Creek (crack your windows to hear the babble) with trails and the Boulder Creek path minutes away. The pet-friendly A-Lodge has 27 rooms, hostel-style bunks and sites for campers and #van-life. Rooms include kitchenettes, and I was happy to try a local porter on tap at check-in. After soaking up some outdoors, enjoy the hot tub, slackline park, yoga, Thursday bluegrass jams, Saturday bands and monthly film nights, which attract hundreds. (Upcoming ones are on July 19 and Aug. 23.) Summer rates start at \$179 for rooms and \$55 for the hostel. If nearby shopping is your

sport, try Basecamp Boulder, a camp-themed hotel in town.

Guidebook musts

Struggling to picture Boulder

before athleisure and cold-pressed juices? Step into **Hotel Boulderado**, where you can ring a bell for service on a 1909 Otis elevator and sip from a historical

drinking fountain that sources its water from Arapahoe Glacier on the Continental Divide. The 160-room, 109-year-old hotel, a block off Pearl Street, is also home to



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Gabriel Angelo, also known as the "San Francisco Trumpet Kid," performs on Pearl Street Mall.

Spruce Farm & Fish restaurant and License No. 1, said to be the first city restaurant with a liquor license after local prohibition ended in 1967. In this cavernous speakeasy, enjoy Sidecars and Pisco Sours, billiards and comedy nights. Summer rates start at \$203. If ritzy is more your style, head to the nearby St. Julien Hotel & Spa.

Explore

Local Faves

If Boulder isn't hippie enough or high enough (elevation-wise) for you, you're in luck. **Nederland**, best known for its spring Frozen Dead Guy Days, is a 30-minute curvy drive west of town. At 8,230 feet, five bucks will buy you a pretty groovy afternoon: a ride on the Carousel of Happiness (complete with a 1913 Wurlitzer) and a pint at Very Nice Brewing Co. Dude, you can't help but smile! Stroll around town, where you'll find street musicians, a coffee and taco bar (Salto) and a shack-sized visitor center with a sticker: "Don't hate. Neditate." One shop was closed with a "Sorry, I'm in Red Rocks" sign. Take a hike or keep on driving: Ned sits on the breathtaking Peak to Peak Highway, a National Scenic By-

way that stretches to Rocky Mountain National Park, if you dare brave the crowds.

Guidebook musts

Car-free and vibrant, **Pearl Street Mall** is the 40-year-old, four-block promenade that serves as the city's commercial and social hub. With a nice mix of boutiques, sidewalk cafes, indies and chains, you'll find Fior Gelato, the three-story Boulder Bookstore and Prana, which offers free daily yoga classes. Check out Spinster Sisters Co. Mercantile (locally made products and "Be Hippy" trucker hats) and the Boulder Psychic Institute (get healed free every Thursday at 6). Stroll slowly enough to enjoy the musicians and performance artists. In the span of a few days, I caught a high school string quartet, mime, bagpiper, tarot-card reader, sombrero-wearing percussionist, accordionist and the legendary Zip code man who stands before a crowd, asks spectators' hometowns and (almost always) guesses their number.

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